

Confession

Matthew 6:9-13 (TWO SLIDES)

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.

Jesus makes three assumptions about us here in **verse 12.**

- 1) You'll keep **sinning**
- 2) You'll be sinned **against**
- 3) You'll **forgive** those who sin against you

Chances are you just had some sort of internal reaction to this.

Maybe you're thinking **"of course I'll keep sinning and I'm glad Jesus expects me to because I plan on it."**

Maybe you're thinking, **"But Christians shouldn't sin... they should experience new life in Christ and Jesus even tells people to leave their life of sin."**

That's something for you other heretics to consider.

Maybe you're thinking... **"Sin is an archaic term that people in power use to shame and manipulate others and to stop them from living their best life – we should all just be true to ourselves."**

Well there's three steps we need to take in response to Jesus' assumptions and teachings on prayer here. And Thomas Oden calls these three steps **"A drama enacted in the presence of God in the quiet inner depths of conscience."** In other words – this happens in prayer.

The first step is

1) A Change of Mind

I think it makes sense for us to turn to the book of Psalms as our guide for today. In fact, the Psalms are sometimes referred to as “the language of prayer.” The Psalms are the most read book of the Bible. They’re also the book that Jesus quotes from the most. And Jesus uses them to guide his own prayers. At certain times in scripture – he prays directly from the Psalms and so he would’ve been incredibly familiar with them. And its through the Psalms that we see the drama of repentance enacted out in prayer before and with a Holy God.

Now I love that Jesus uses the word “debts” here instead of sins. “Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors.” And the reason I like it is because the Jews have three primary ways for communicating our debt to God – not just sin.

Look at Psalm 51:1-2

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

Now historically this is understood as the psalm or the prayer of David sometime after Nathan confronts him and causes him to realize his sin – that he’s committed adultery with Bathsheeba – coerced her to have sex with him and then killed her husband. So at this point David is a man who has fallen from the highest point of his faith journey to the lowest point of his life. And he uses **three words** to describe it.

1. Sin
2. Iniquity
3. Transgression

“Sin” in the Old Testament just meant something more like “**failure**” or “missing the mark” and usually had moral failure in mind but it was even used in Judges 20:16

¹⁶ **Out of all these** people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

Each one could sling a stone at a hair and not “**sin.**”

To “sin” is essentially to fail or to miss.

The Hebrew word for iniquity is closely related to this idea of being crooked or bent. It’s **perversion**. So in the book of **Job** a person who sins – is someone who bends or perverts what is right.

And finally there’s this word – **Transgression**. Someone who transgresses betrays trust. They hurt a relationship. For example – a thief that breaks into your home has sinned. They’ve failed to live a righteous life and maybe they’ve bent or broken their community by creating a neighborhood that doesn’t feel safe. BUT if that thief was also your neighbor – someone that you should be able to trust – someone who should be looking out for you while you were out of town then not only have they sinned and made something crooked but they’ve also transgressed – they’ve **betrayed** your relationship.

And this trifecta of sin, iniquity, and transgression is common in the Old Testament. When God describes himself to Moses we're told...

⁶Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin..."

(Exodus 34:6-7)

You see humans are born with a purpose. Kory talked about this last week - the Israelites would've understood that it was our job as people made in the image of God to order the earth well.

Look at God's plan for humanity in **Genesis 1:28**

So in Genesis man and woman (not Adam and Eve only but all of humanity) were given a command "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28)

Look at the language here. In scripture – humanity is God's final creative work. He makes man and woman in His image. He says, "It's very good." And He tells them to create, to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to rule it. That's God's job and He entrusts it to us. And so we sin when we fail to do that job well. So look we:

- Fail to do God's will (that's sin)
- We make our way and our world crooked (That's iniquity)
- And we betray God's trust and the trust of other people (that's transgression)

That's not a popular message in today's world. I remember when we were taught about the holocaust in school the prevailing message was: Anyone is capable of the most heinous acts. That's not today's message though is it? Today – people are basically good and given the opportunity they'll usually choose to do the right thing. The problem with that is twofold: 1) It's not true. When there are consequences for doing the right thing, people usually won't and when there are no consequences for doing the wrong thing people usually will. 2) It causes us to dehumanize criminals. The media is quick to label someone who has committed a crime as an animal or a monster and we dehumanize people for doing the same things that we're capable of doing. Christians don't do that – we shouldn't do that – not if our behavior aligns with our theology.

In 1974 a young 23 year old woman named **Marina Abramovic** stood in the middle of an art gallery. In front of her is a table with 76 items. A glass of water. A hammer. A shoe. A coat. A knife. A feather. A flower. A razor blade. A polaroid camera. A loaded gun. **And there's a sign...**

Instructions.

There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired.

Performance.

I am the object.

During this period I take full responsibility.

Duration: 6 hours (8 pm – 2 am).

What do you think? Does she walk away from that experience looking like she had just gotten a makeover? Did they braid her hair, wash her face, apply make up to her and put flowers in her hair?

At a recent Ted talk reflecting back on the event She said:

“And after six hours were finished, I... started walking towards the public. I was a mess. I was half-naked, I was full of blood and tears were running down my face.”

And do you know what happened next? No one could look her in the face. Within a matter of minutes everyone left.

The truth is – we’ve all done things that we’d like to look away from.

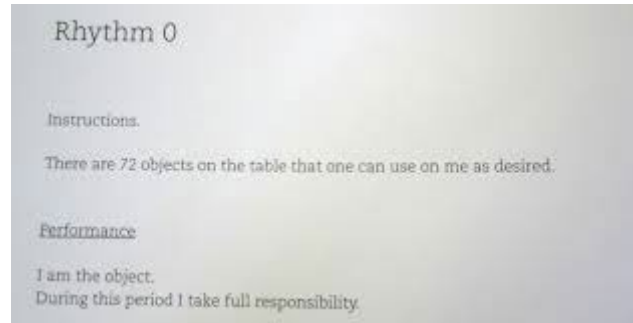
In Psalm 51 David says

³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

What’s he saying? Is he saying that murdering Uriah and coercing his wife to have sex with him wasn’t primarily a sin against them but it was a sin against God. How? Why? Isn’t that callous? I have no doubt that David felt a tremendous debt to the people he hurt. He’s not denying that. He’s emphasizing that God made Him and gave Him life and purpose and freedom and therefore He’s accountable to God. God has asked us to rule over creation according to His will.

According to scripture – this life is God’s. This creation is God’s. This universe is God’s. And God wants a partnership with us. He’s entrusted us with freedom and power and responsibility. And so the wisdom of this age – to live your best life, be true to yourself, find your own meaning – that’s exactly the sin of Adam and Eve. That idea of deciding for ourselves what’s good and what’s evil. Of living our own truth. That’s what it means to turn your back on God. That’s the sin that caused the Fall and we continue to commit it today. This world doesn’t belong to you.

Someone once said that sin was sitting on the throne of God’s sovereignty. It’s saying – your will be done but not in this area of my influence. This is mine. I’ll do what I want here.



It sounds pretty hopeless for us, if we're honest, doesn't it?

Well, look at Psalm 32:1

¹Blessed is the one
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

A blessed person is someone that is in a favored position. A blessed person is someone whose situation and life is desirable. That's what it means – a blessed person is enviable. Look – David doesn't say blessed is the person who does not sin. But blessed is the person who sins and is forgiven. You could say it this way – blessed is the person who sees their sin for what it is. Tim Keller said in a sermon once something that I think is pretty applicable here:

“The worst thing God can do to you, and the most just form of punishment God could possibly give you, is to give you over to the strongest desires of your hearts. In other words, let your wishes come true. That's the worst thing God could possibly do, and the most fair thing... The worst thing God could actually do is give you a good life, let everything happen the way you want it to happen.”

You see? A Blessed person is someone who knows their sin, knows the folly of it, and knows the consequences of it. If God gave you everything you ever wanted and let everything happen the way you've always wanted it to happen – you'd probably not get very far in life. Your inner life would be Hell. Why? Because you'd be sinning but you'd never know it, you'd never know the folly of it, or the consequences of it.

C.S. Lewis says it this way:

When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse he understands his own badness less and less. A moderately bad man knows he is not very good: a thoroughly bad man thinks he is all right. This is common sense, really. You understand sleep when you are awake, not while you are sleeping. You can see mistakes in arithmetic when your mind is working properly: while you are making them you cannot see them. You can understand the nature of drunkenness when you are sober, not when you are drunk. Good people know about both good and evil: bad people do not know about either.

So maybe you're aware of your sin. You're 1/3 of the way to forgiveness because you're one third of the way repented. This is how far we've made it:

Psalm 51:3

³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

2) A Change of Heart (Contrition)

Repentance doesn't just require a change of thinking – it requires a deep heartfelt sorrow over sin.

Look at Psalm 51:16-17

- ¹⁶You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
¹⁷My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

God doesn't want religious acts – those are fine if they help to mediate a heart of repentance but they're not the end goal.

What does he want? A broken and repentant heart.

Remember the Beatitudes

- ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
⁵Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

What does it mean to be poor in Spirit? It means to recognize that you can't be righteous through your own power. You'll never be good enough to earn heaven.

What does it mean to mourn? It means to mourn sin. To mourn your offenses.

What does it mean to be meek? It means to be able to humble yourself before God and admit your need for him.

What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteous? It means to want desperately to live a godly life.

Is this you? If not, don't put this off. Seek this. Pursue it. Labor in prayer. Spend time with God – reviewing your life, your sin, your soul.

Use the Language of Prayer

- ²³Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
²⁴See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

If you're able to get this far – if you can not only change your mind and see your sin but you can also mourn and confess your sin then at this point we're 2/3s of the way through repentance and unfortunately it's only going to get harder. What more could God want? I know my sin, I deeply regret my sin, isn't that enough?

3) A Change of Direction (Reformation)

There's three things that repentance requires of us. Conviction – that is, a change of mind... and acknowledgement of our sin. Contrition – that is, a change of heart – deeply regretting our choices... and finally reformation – a change of direction – a willful decision to leave sin.

Psalm 51:12-13

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and make me willing to obey you.

¹³ Then I will teach your ways to rebels,
and they will return to you.

Biblically speaking you haven't repented until you've decided to leave your life of sin. "God, I'm sorry I sinned but let's be honest – I plan on doing it again." That is not repentance. It's something but it's not repentance.

No, repentance is a 180. God – that thing failed you, I'm going this way. God that thing came between me and you – I don't want it anymore. God that choice was made in opposition to your will – you didn't agree with that and it hurt your mission and your vision of what this world will be. God, I'm joining your side.

Wait, wait wait, I thought you said that Jesus expects me to keep sinning? Doesn't he teach me to pray for forgiveness? Yes. Every single Christian will always be able to pray the Lord's prayer no matter where they're at in their walk with God.

But not all sins are equal in the eyes of God – Jesus even says explicitly that some sins are greater than others. Okay so sins become greater or worse based on three main factors.

- 1) The gravity of the sin (how serious was it?)
- 2) The intention of the sin (how much were you aware that what you were doing was wrong)
- 3) The consent (Were you pressured or coerced, did you do it willingly or unwillingly, did you do it maliciously?)

And so for the Christian – yes we can always pray the Lord's Prayer but we also change direction. Our sins become less and less in frequency, in gravity, in intention, and in consent.

If sin is sitting on the throne of God's sovereignty then repentance is saying, "God – how can I join you in what you're doing in the world today?"

How do you do that? How do you give up the sin that you love? How do you change direction and reform your life. Well here it is - Reformation comes through moral courage empowered by deep gratitude.

We see this again and again in scripture. In Luke 19 Jesus has dinner with Zacchaeus and Zacchaeus pledges to give half his wealth away and pay back 4x anything that he's stolen. Why? Because Jesus wants a relationship with him.

In Luke 7 A woman interrupts a meal between Jesus and a pharisee – she wipes Jesus’ feet with her hair and tears and pours perfume on them. This scandalous and courageous act of love offends the pharisee and scripture says:

“44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

What’s happening? A change of direction.

Have you heard the phrase hurt people hurt people? Well loved people love people and forgiven people forgive people.

And so Jesus makes three assumptions.

- 1) You’ll keep sinning
- 2) People will sin against you
- 3) You’ll forgive them when they do

Grace is assertive. The tax collector says, “If I’ve cheated anyone, I’ll pay them back.” He doesn’t say, “I’ll wait for them to issue a formal complaint. The forgiven woman interrupts a dinner. The Word takes on flesh and is born in a manger. While we were yet still sinners – Christ died for us. Grace is assertive. Grace seeks to put things right. Grace seeks reconciliation. So Jesus assumes that as we ask for forgiveness regularly, we’ll have already forgiven those who have hurt us.

We’re going to end this message today by hearing from one of our brothers who was hit hard with the reality of this kingdom principle. Because I think you know – it’s easy for someone who hasn’t been deeply wounded to both preach and receive a sermon like this. But what about when the offense is great?